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Nixon OK'd Wiretaps Helms Faces Probers

CIA Watergate Role Probed

BY OSWALD JOHNSTON
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—Associated Press

Former CIA Director Richard Helms before Senate subcommittee today.

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CIA: Role in Watergate Probed

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Gray III, the man the CIA was expressly ordered by Haldeman and Ehrlichman to warn off the scent, tried to inform Nixon last July 6 that something was wrong.

ACCORDING TO THE Walters account, it was only that day that Gray learned that the CIA had been dragged by the White House team into an effort to block an FBI investigation of Republican campaign funds that were "laundered" through a Mexico City bank en route to the bank account of one of the Watergate conspirators.

Helms, who according to the Walters account had been aware of such White House maneuvers for more than a week before Gray found them out, testified today before two congressional committees probing CIA complicity in White House-directed operations, intelligence subcommittees of the Senate Appropriations and the

House Armed Services committees. Helms is scheduled to face the full Senate Armed Services Committee tomorrow.

AS CIA CHIEF, Helms, unlike Gray, was directly responsible to the President. Nevertheless, acting Armed Services Committee Chairman Stuart Symington, D-Mo., sought yesterday to exonerate Helms and all other CIA officials of wrongdoing or even official laxity.

Citing the "facts of life in Washington," Symington offered this explanation: "When the President's staff tells you to do something, you naturally feel that you know what you should do — and you do it."

Helms, now ambassador to Iran, was called back to Washington last weekend as reports began to spread of CIA involvement in Watergate, its coverup and the related burglary of Pentagon papers defendant Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

He has been in Washington since Monday and spent more than five hours yesterday at the U.S. Courthouse, where he was interviewed by Watergate prosecutors. Authorities declined to say if he would testify before the Watergate grand jury.

HELMS' HEARING before both subcommittees today was originally planned as testimony limited to the Ellsberg burglary, which involved a CIA supply of false documents, disguises and other materials to Watergate conspirator and former CIA agent E. Howard Hunt during the summer of 1971.

Walters' testimony, however, has brought the agency into the thick of the Watergate scandal itself. Both Sen. John L. McClellan, D-Ark., head of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee, and Rep. Lucien N. Nedzi, D-Mich., head of the House Armed Services subcommittee, have been furnished copies of a sworn affidavit in

which Walters yesterday set forth substantially the same account he gave the Senate Armed Services Committee.

The Walters account, besides setting forth in the greatest detail so far available the efforts of high White House aides to cover up the Watergate burglary, also gives the fullest account so far of an effort to pin some of the blame on the CIA.

TAKEN TOGETHER with last week's account of Gray's hesitant efforts to thread his way through the Watergate labyrinth, the Walters account shows a White House inner circle marshaling all its resources to protect itself and other administration officials within a week after the Watergate break-in.

According to these accounts, the coverup began last June 23 — six days after the discovery June 17 that a former CIA agent named James W. McCord and four Cuban-Americans recruited in the name of national security had in-

vaded Democratic party headquarters in the Watergate, where they had placed an electronic eavesdropping device.

On June 23, Helms and Walters were summoned to Ehrlichman's White House office and were there informed by Haldeman "that the Watergate incident might be exploited by the opposition" — presumably the Democrats — and told that something must be done.

With Helms apparently acquiescing, Haldeman ordered Walters to bypass his boss and go directly to Gray in an effort to block an FBI investigation of the Mexican funds on the grounds that the probe would compromise CIA operations in Mexico.

THE ORDER, according to an Armed Services Committee paraphrase of Walters' still-classified testimony, was "decided" within the White House. Symington, presenting the Walters narrative to reporters yesterday, said there was no testimony or

evidence to link such orders to Nixon himself.

Walters, who joined the CIA only that spring, carried that message to Gray the same day. Afterwards he checked agency records and discovered there were no operations in Mexico that could have been compromised by an FBI probe of the bank accounts. Helms, an agency veteran who had been director since 1966, apparently still did not intervene.

It had been impressed on both Helms and Walters that John W. Dean III, the President's counsel, was in charge of Watergate affairs in the White House. Accordingly, Walters on June 26 went to the White House counsel with the information that there was no CIA involvement in Mexico and let the matter rest there. He related this the same day to Helms, who apparently was satisfied and "assured Gen. Walters that he was acting correctly," according to the testimony.

Walters' reluctance to cooperate evidently bothered the White House group, however. The next day, Dean summoned Walters to another meeting and, according to the committee account, "asked if there was some way the CIA could go bail or pay the salaries of the individuals accuses in the Watergate case while they were in jail." Walters again refused and this time threatened to resign rather than identify McCord and the "Miami four" of the Watergate burglary as regular CIA operatives.

DEAN CALLED Walters again June 28 — the third try in as many days. This time he asked "if there could have been some CIA involvement that Gen. Walters did not know about."

Walters again refused to go along, and this time threatened to go directly to the President to protest if he were ordered to compromise the CIA in Watergate, according to testimony.

There is no publicly known evidence that either Walters or Helms actually did this. But by this time, June 28, FBI director Gray was becoming

restless and doubtful on his side of the investigatory fence.

ACCORDING TO Gray's reported testimony to Senate investigators, he had grown extremely worried about the CIA involvement he had been told about by Walters on June 23 and by the White House team intermittently since then. He independently tried to set up a meeting with Helms and Walters on June 28, but was dissuaded that morning by Ehrlichman, who according to reported Senate testimony canceled the meeting.

Finally, on July 5, Gray took his doubts directly to Walters.

In a telephone call reported in Walters' testimony, Gray told the CIA deputy "that he could not stop the investigation of the Mexican financing unless he received a letter from the (CIA) director or Gen. Walters stating that such an investigation would damage the agency's access in Mexico.

This must have distressed Walters, who had been told more than a week before, on June 26, that Dean would deal with his misgivings on this point. On July 6, according to the Walters account, the CIA deputy went to see Gray, personally insisted that the FBI probe of the Mexican financing would endanger no CIA operations, and assured him that the CIA had no inter-

est in interfering with any investigation.

WALTERS "then testified that he told Mr. Gray the story of his meeting with Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Ehrlichman, and that he had been told to convey his previous message to Mr. Gray," the committee narrative continues. "Gen. Walters testified that he repeated to Mr. Gray his determination to resign if there was an attempt to compromise the CIA in this issue."

It was on that same day that Gray tried to warn Nixon directly that there was something wrong with the White House handling of the case, according to his own reported testimony before the Senate Watergate investigating committee.

On July 6, Gray telephoned campaign director Clark McGregor to complain about the "run-around" he was getting from the White House staff. According to on report of the testimony, Gray made this call with the acquiescence of a high CIA official — presumably Walters.

Within 30 minutes of the call to McGregor, Gray received a call from Nixon himself, and he repeated the complaint. According to his reported testimony, Gray was told to continue his investigation as he had been doing, and not to concern himself with White House involvement.